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Elementary students impressed with WKU tour

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After receiving a tour of Western Kentucky University's campus, fourth-grade student Jaxen Sequeira said he's found at least one good reason to look forward to college.

"College is the best place ever – you have freedom from your parents," he said.

The 10-year-old T.C. Cherry Elementary School student was one of nearly 130 from three local Bowling Green Independent Schools to get a glimpse of what the college experience can be like during a special tour of the campus.

For the second year, the "College Road Trip" project rounded up fourth-grade students from Parker-Bennett-Curry, Dishman-McGinnis and T.C. Cherry elementary schools to give the class of 2017 a bit of encouragement to pursue goals of higher education.

The school district targeted students in schools receiving Title 1 funds, which are dispersed based on the numbers of children receiving free and reduced lunch.

Leslie Peek, public relations coordinator for the district, said the visit gives elementary students a chance to look at a college campus as well as the processes of admissions and financial aid.

Nine-year-old Ivan Arce, who attends Parker-Bennett-Curry, said he learned "you can do almost anything in college.

"I learned you really have to get good grades to come here and you can come here for free if you get good grades," he said. "I also liked the cafeteria because they have sodas and in elementary school you don't."

Paul Casebolt, admissions counselor for WKU, said the tours are important to expose students not only to Western, but the college experience.

"We love our local students and would love to see all of them come to Western, but first and foremost, we want them to go to college because we want them to have successful futures," he said.

The students toured some of the student dorms and exercise facilities after catching a glimpse of the football and basketball arenas.

Teresa Sneed, parent involvement and Even Start coordinator for the school district, said she enjoyed listening to the students' excitement on the bus ride to campus.

“One little girl said, ‘I’m just so excited to go to Western’s campus. I’ve never been on campus before,’ ” Sneed said. “It just makes me think of the opportunities a lot of students don’t have. We’re appreciative to Bowling Green Independent Schools for seeing the vision to instill in students that every one of them can have an opportunity to go to college.”

Assistant Hilltoppers basketball coach David Boyden talked to the students about the importance of getting a college degree. But Jaxen said he already had plans to go to school – not just for the freedom, but to become a marine biologist.

“Hopefully, when I make it to college, Western will be as good as it is now,” he said.